

When in the late summer of 1891 Morant arrived in England, he at once set to work to carry out the plans he had prepared before he left Siam, in collaboration with Prince Damrong, the Siamese Minister of Education, including the establishment of a college for some of the younger children of the King and his brothers, and of a similar girls' college to make provision for the princesses of the Royal Household. He found Miss Nightingale keenly interested in these new educational developments, and she arranged when Morant had selected the two women who seemed best suited for the proposed college for princesses, she would interview them, and talk over with them the difficulties which he told her they would have to encounter. He made other arrangements for teaching appointments for the Siamese Government, which absorbed a good deal of his time. "So hard, in fact, did he work that Miss Nightingale remarked that his idea of 'leave' seemed to consist in working twenty-three hours of the twenty-four."

On his return to Siam in May, 1892, Morant found things in a difficult position. There had been a change in the method of government. A Council of Ministers had been formed to which a considerable amount of executive power had been delegated by the King. But the scheme was not proving a success.

Morant discussed very seriously with the King the proper course to be followed for the Crown Prince's education. The King assented to his views and "in order to make it clear to all the members of the Council that Morant was to be invested with full authority over the Crown Prince's manner of life and general conduct as well as over his courses of study, he summoned him to appear before a meeting of the princes and nobles and there presented him with a golden salver, as a sign that he handed over his eldest son to his keeping." It was perhaps inevitable that "the prominent position which he had attained aroused some jealousy both in Siamese Court circles and in the European colony, where he was spoken of as the 'uncrowned King of Siam.'"

As headmaster of the newly established college for princes and the other colleges requiring supervision, he undertook an enormous amount of work, so that we find Miss Nightingale writing to him "we pray you to take care of your own health and spirit, as you do of others' spirits, to feed and to sleep and to rest properly."

"The greatest strain, however, upon Morant at this period was not so much the amount of work that he took upon himself as the increasing jealousy and distrust of the Court Circle."

Then, it so happened, that Siam was swept into the midst of an external crisis, brought about by the colonial ambitions of France, "which for the time being shattered the relations of friendship and confidence which had grown up between the Siamese and Europeans."

"While England's star was in the ascendant, all was well; but when disillusionment with England set in, disillusionment with the Englishman followed—through jealousy, intrigue and foreign complications his position was undermined, and at the end of seven years he was cast aside by the ruler of the country he had served so well. . . . The system of education which he had worked so strenuously to introduce into the schools was allowed to languish; and with blasted hopes and foiled endeavours, he returned to his own land to begin the world again. . . . After the final parting from the scene of his labours, the iron entered into his soul."

"W. B. Richmond, to whose friendly house he repaired on landing, was struck by the haggard look in his deep-set eyes. 'Come to my studio at once,' he said without giving him time to sit down, 'yours is the very face I have been wanting for my Central Figure at St. Paul's.' And then and there he set him down by his easel and made his sketch

for the face of the Redeemer in the Apse mosaic, which, in the look of its sorrowing eyes, reveals the suffering that had been endured."

For Morant himself the difficulty was to find fresh occupation at thirty-one years of age. "Tired and worn as he was by the long strain and worry of his last year in Siam, he was almost at the end of his tether, and the news of the death of the Crown Prince, on whom he had lavished so much care, and a severe illness, brought on by the rigours of an English winter, reduced him to a state of exhaustion and made him feel that he had nothing left to live for."

"But in his darkest hour solace was brought to him through the sympathy and friendship of the lady who afterwards became his wife . . . and enabled him to face the world again with hope and joy."

EDUCATION.

In 1895 he obtained the post of Assistant Director of a new Department of the Education Office, "the Office of Special Enquiries."

Thenceforth he was absorbed in the struggle to build up the chaotic English educational system on a firm foundation. In 1899, the Board of Education Act was passed, merging the three Departments dealing with primary, secondary and technical education, and establishing a single Central Authority for all types and groups of schools, in the face of the most determined opposition.

The question of a Central Authority had been settled, but the question of the Local Authority remained, and no solution was in sight. What was known as the "Cockerton Case" had not yet come into Court; when it did, however, it gave welcome confirmation to the Government's view that the Counties and County Boroughs were the proper local authorities for secondary education.

It was not until December 20th, 1902, that the Education Bill sponsored by Mr. Balfour as Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, was placed on the Statute Book, after the most acute controversy centreing largely round the question of religious education. In the course of this Mr. Lloyd George predicted that "the clergyman would come down to the school like a roaring lion seeking what little Nonconformists he could devour at the expense of the ratepayers."

It was with high vision that "Morant entered upon his administrative duties as soon as the Parliamentary turmoil was over, and the projects upon which he had laboured so long had become the law of the land."

Then, in 1911, just as "once before in a foreign land, he had seen the work of years swept aside in the fury of a political crisis, now, in his own country, a chance indiscretion, occurring in the midst of a political and constitutional upheaval, laid him open to the combined attacks of politicians and teachers, and all the devotion that he had shown for education was lost sight of beneath a storm of recrimination. . . . It was a sad moment for Morant, when he was called upon to sever his connection with the work to which he had consecrated the best years of his life."

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE.

But now "Lloyd George's great scheme for National Health Insurance had been forced through Parliament, in the face of an ever-growing tide of opposition. Lloyd George looked round him for a man who would be strong enough to tackle the problem, and he fixed upon the man before whose iron will and unflinching resource his own torrential assault upon the Education Bill nine years before had failed. Morant had then proved himself a foeman worthy of his steel; he should now prove himself his stout henchman to fight a common enemy. On November 28th, 1911, Lloyd George announced to an astonished House that Morant was to be the Chairman of the National Insurance Commission for England."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)